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ABSTRACT

This five-part paper provides an overview of the use of quality circles as a participative management technique in community colleges. Section I offers an introduction to the technique, reviewing the history of quality circles from their development in Japan in the early 1960s to their introduction in American higher education in the early 1980s. This section also explains the mechanics of quality circles, and offers recommendations for avoiding the pitfalls that may impede their successful implementation. After section II examines the theoretical bases for quality circles, section III addresses the question of whether quality circles can be applied to higher education, offering three examples of their use in community colleges. Next, section IV presents a case study of the implementation of a system of quality circles at Midlands Technical College in South Carolina, describing in turn the need for participatory management, the organizational climate of the college, the establishment of an organizational renewal committee, consultant selection, training, implementation, ongoing public relations and marketing, and evaluation. Finally, section V offers conclusions, among them that the Midlands experience has proved that there can never be too much planning for the establishment of quality circles. (EJV)

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LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF QUALITY CIRCLES IN A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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I. INTRODUCTION TO QUALITY CIRCLES

Quality circles are a participative management technique which has emerged only in the last two decades. Its concomitant philosophy, "Theory Z" has furthered extended of the most fundamental theories of management. Quality circles have shown impressive success in some industrial organizations. That success is reflected in increased productivity, cost savings and improved employee attitudes. Interest in quality circles has increased dramatically in the last several years. Metz (1981) reported that membership in the International Association of Quality Circles increased 600 percent in a recent year[1] (p. 71).

The purpose of this study is to provide an overview of quality circles, particularly their application in higher education. Quality circle success usually depends on pre-implementation preparation to establish the necessary organizational climate. A case study of the pre-implementation phase at Midlands Technical College in Columbia, South Carolina is offered. This institution's experience is very timely since the initial quality circle start-up virtually coincides with the presentation of this study. This study intends to provide a conceptual rather than empirical orientation and a practical "how to" approach.

A. History of Quality Circles

Quality circle incipience was in Japan in the early 1960's promotional activities of the Japanese Union of Scientists and Engineers under the leadership of Dr. Kaoru Ishikawa. The recognition of a reputation for inferior products spurred the Japanese to seek quality control techniques to increase their

competitive viability. Today, an estimated 10 million Japanese are involved in quality circles. Quality circles were begun in America in 1974 at Lockheed after a Lockheed delegation visited Japan to study the concept. By 1975, there were 15 companies operating quality circles. The number leaped from 30 by 1977 to an estimated 230 by 1980, and over 3,000 by 1981[2] (p. 71). Since then, the popularity of quality circles has continued as an estimated 6,300 organizations had quality circles[3] (p. 71). Among other American corporations deploying quality circles have been J.C. Penney, IBM, Bechtel, General Electric, Hewlett-Packard, Eli Lilly, and Hughes Aircraft. Successful results have been found at the corporate level through better communication, decreases in tardiness, absenteeism and work disruption, improved morale, and cost savings[4] (pp. 11-12).

Quality circle introduction in American higher education lagged behind the industrial pacesetters. There is no certainty of which institution was the first to institute a quality circle system. In 1981, quality circles were installed virtually simultaneously at Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon and Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, North Carolina. Literature from both programs considered their respective colleges to be the first known community college to implement quality circle systems. Each of these schools have had a track record of successful results from quality circles. Each has provided substantial proselitization and training to the educational and business sectors. Many institutions of higher education have introduced quality circles into their management

structure. Lane's effort was part of an overall productivity improvement effort. Central Piedmont's was a pilot effort for the North Carolina Department of Community Colleges.

Quality circles are not a panacea for all of an organization's woes. Nor should stories of quality circle success create the assumption that all quality circles will succeed. Metz (1981) underscored the dearth of articles on quality circle programs which have failed[5] (p. 71). He estimated only one-third of the quality circles in Japan are doing well. So (1984) documented the phenomenon of how programs such as PPBS, Zero Based Budgeting, MBO, etc. take an existing concept and repackage it into a much-ballyhooed "new" concept viewed as a panacea[6] (pp. 16-21). Metz established the critical question as to whether the popularity of quality circles were a passing fad:

> Most firms can install quality circles and gain some short-term benefits. The real test of success will be whether quality circles exist two, three or four years later. Or will quality circles be tossed onto the organizational trash-heap along with other programs as MBO, zero-defects, job enrichment, and a variety of other productivity and cost improvement schemes' (p. 72).

The perceived "fad" nature of quality circles has created numerous "instant expert" consultants. The rapid popularity risks an overall poor performance or outright failure. Failure due to poor pre-implementation preparation would bely the true salutory effects of quality circles to an organization. Kenneth Blanchard, creator of the "One Minute Manager" concept, suggested at a seminar attended by this author that the Theory Z concept is already on the wane as a popular concept. The attention to the theoretical basis of Theory Z

has undoubtedly waned since its heyday in 1981. However, attention strongly persists on the mechanisms to convert the theory into organizational practice.

B. Mechanics of Quality Circles

Quality circles come under the same milieu of participative management with such other techniques as committees, task forces, Delphi technique, and suggestion systems. The key differences are that it is systematic, the individual has a choice of which of his or her own (unit) problems to consider, and participation is voluntary. There are no limitations on the number of circles an organization can have or the number of problems quality circles can solve.

Quality circles may be a solution to the ineffectiveness and overuse of committees in higher education. Dillard (1983) provided a good overview of the problems in higher education[8] (pp. 103-113). Unfortunately, he concluded asking for more alternative approaches to committee use.

Marshall (1973) suggested eliminating 90 percent of higher education committees, limiting their agenda to the essential needs of the institution, and using as members those who know something about the issues concerned[9] (pp. 13-18). Quality circles could be an answer for academia to bridge the gap from the inadequacies of committee decision making.

What is a quality circle? It is a small group of workers (from 4 to 14). Although the literature disagrees on the precise number, fewer than four would be too small. More than fourteen would be too unwieldy a group. Membership on a quality circle is voluntary. The

group solves problems in their work area. A specific problem solving and data collection process is used.

There are misconceptions on what a quality circle is. It is not a staff meeting. It is not a panacea for the organization's problems. It is not a gimmick or fad. The concept's being in a progression of widely-heralded then soon-discarded management techniques tend to give quality circles a faddish image. An emerging history of concrete successes should dispell any "fad" label to quality circles. Quality circles will be a fad only when viewed as a "quick fix." They will fail when the proper planning and preparation are lacking.

The objectives of quality circles are:

1. to improve the quality of work life.
2. increase "ownership" of the job.
3. utilize staff creativity and problem solving skills.
4. increase participation in decision marking.
5. provide recognition to staff.
6. make jobs run smoother.

How is the quality circle system structured? A facilitator is a person outside the quality circle work area who trains the circle in the quality circle process. This individual acts as an advisory and resource person, providing a liaison between circles. The facilitator maintains enthusiasm when the progress of circles is slow. The leader is a member of the work area. Functioning generally like the facilitator, the leader is a permanent part of the

circle rather than the situational role of the leader. Members of quality circles participate voluntarily, using good group process and communication skills. They follow the process strictly.

The group rules are that the employee is expert, all in the circle voluntarily participate, and training in problem solving is mandatory. Meetings are well-planned and efficient. The typical quality circle meeting is held once a week for an hour on paid time. It follows a preplanned agenda. Emphasis is on the positive. Topics such as personalities, personnel issues, salaries, etc. are not allowed for discussion. Precise minutes are taken. Responsibilities for different parts of the meeting are shared.

Throughout the process, specific techniques such as brainstorming, Pareto analysis, cause-effect diagrams, situation-target-proposals (STP) and force field analysis are used as needed.

Problem selection is the circle's prerogative. After causes of problems are determined, potential solutions are identified. Experimentation and data collection are undertaken. The recommendations are then formally presented to management.

C. Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

There are many pitfalls to successful quality circle installation and implementation. Thompson (1982) suggested misunderstanding the process by upper management as well as resistance by middle management and supervision as factors. He also cited poor training, empire building by the quality circle office, failure to implement circle proposals, and failure to measure results

of the process as pitfalls. Finally, he warned against deviating from the basic quality circle structure[10] (pp. 31-32).

Metz (1981) cautioned against several factors making a difference in quality circle success or failure: First, there is failure of an assessment of managerial and organizational readiness for quality circles. Managerial practices must be supportive. If not, Metz discouraged installation until organizational development, evolution, or planned change. Second, there is failure to do adequate start-up and implementation planning. Third, there is failure to exercise care in the selection of the facilitator. This important position should be filled with one with good management, group, and interpersonal skills[11] (p. 72).

Specific steps to avoid the pitfalls were suggested by Thompson (1982):

1. Obtain upper management support and commitment and establish a quality circle office to promote the quality circle process throughout the organization.
2. Develop a logical strategy for forming circles on the basis of the pitfalls and the long-term goal: to make quality circles a permanent self-sustaining part of the management process.
3. Promote within the organization the systems that are necessary to support the quality circle process.
4. Prepare training programs for all members of the organization.
5. Work out all the details, from acquiring a meeting room to codifying the rules of the quality circle process[12] (pp. 31-32).

Cole (1983) provided yet a different perspective as to overcoming quality circle implementation problems. He felt the organization should "transition from a narrow focus of quality circles to more broad gauged participation." He proscribed linking circles closely with current management objectives. To Cole, the recognition of the organizational development implications of quality circles are essential to their success[13] (p. 41).

II. THEORETICAL BASIS

Ouchi (1981) expounded Theory Z as a theoretical basis for quality circles.[14] The theory was based on a model of Japanese management practices. As its name implies, Theory Z was supposedly the next step beyond McGregor's (1960) Theory X and Theory Y.[15] Theory X held a negative view of employees in the work environment: they are lazy and consider work a chore for which they must be forced to produce and accept responsibility. Theory Y saw people liking work, deriving satisfaction in work through self-direction and self-motivation. Theory Z has the main objective of "developing the ability of the organization to coordinate people, not technology, in order to achieve productivity"[16] (p. 78). Ouchi (1981) postulated thirteen steps for an organization to make a transition to a Theory Z organization.

1. Understanding the Theory Z organization.
2. Audit the organization's philosophy.
3. Define the desired philosophy and involve top people.
4. Implement the philosophy by creating structure and incentives.
5. Develop interpersonal skills.

6. Test new management systems and gather feedback.
7. Involve employee bargaining units.
8. Stabilize employment.
9. Establish a system of slow evaluation and promotion.
10. Broaden career development.
11. Implementation at the top management levels.
12. Seek areas to implement participation.
13. Encourage the development of holistic relationships[17] (pp. 99-127).

There are great organizational development implications in Theory Z. Clearly, organizational power arrangements are altered. It is imperative for shifts to a Theory Z emphasis to be initiated top-down. Success depends on greater participation at the lower levels of the organization.

Ouchi (1981) saw four interdependent characteristics of Theory Z organizations:

1. Commitment to an overall philosophy.
2. Emphasis on the long-term.
3. Trust.
4. Participative decision making.[18]

Thus, participative decision making processes and structure do not exist in a vacuum. They are the product of carefully developed philosophies and practices organization-wide.

The success of Japanese quality circles, the urgency to "meet the Japanese challenge," and the tendency of new management approaches to be widely adopted had made "Theory Z" attractive in concept to America.

Practical adaptations of the model should be made for American organizations. Thus, overemphasis on the theoretical model could overemphasize factors inherent to Japanese culture and tradition.

Ouchi's thirteen points can be simplified for application to a higher education institution. Organizations operating under a Theory X management style would not be amenable to Theory Z. Theory Y organizations could make the extention to Theory Z. Higher education organizations have personnel more intelligent and better educated than the typical industry implementing quality circles. Institutions where long-range planning is emphasized are better candidates for Theory Z than those which evolve incrementally and "muddle through." Institutions emphasizing faculty and staff development as well as showing regard for the students have good Theory Z potential. The team orientation of the school and interdepartmental cooperation is another factor. Awareness of overall philosophy and mission are important factors. The typical university employee obviously can not recite formal college mission and philosophy statements. There should be, however, institution-wide clarity as to what the institution is all about. Theoretically in any organization, philosophy and mission statements should be reviewed annually. The advent of strategic planning in higher education should bring awareness of central mission into greater focus institution-wide.

Thus, consideration of organizational culture is important in determining application of Theory Z to higher education. The model can be applied for possible quality circle implementation. It must be

adapted for practical, institution-specific factors rather than excessive theoretical emphasis on factors inherent to Japanese business. Quality circles are but a mechanism in a continuing process which is organization development.

III. QUALITY CIRCLES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

American industrial success at implementing participative management is well documented. Adaptations of Theory Z through quality circles in education is less documented. Chase (1983) suggested that despite differences in industry and education, they shared a common public distrust of their products[19] (p. 18).

Nichols (1982) initially questioned whether quality circles could be applied to higher education. He adduced five obstacles to the development of quality circles in higher education:

1. Despite the appearance of American higher education management being highly participatory, it actually is not.
2. The lack of participatory leadership models in higher education.
3. Lack of familiarity in higher education with group decision making.
4. Confusion over who is responsible for quality control in education.
5. The lack of agreement on what the "product" of education[20] (p. 72).

These factors need to be considered before quality circle implementation in higher education institutions. However, there is no real difference in a quality circle structure as far as an academic

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organization is concerned. Although Nichols called for new models for quality circles in higher education, the model remains the same. It is the context and environment which is different. The origin of quality circles occurred in the manufacturing sector. With a manufacturing orientation to much of the literature, quality circle evaluative measures of cost savings and increased productivity become less relevant if not irrelevant for education. Bellanca (1982) suggested that effectiveness rather than productivity was the appropriate quality circle evaluative measure for education[21] (p. 33).

Fast (1984) suggested the major effect of quality circles in an educational environment may be the creation of excitement and newness and proving a catalyst for experimentation and change[22] (p. 6).

The environmental context of higher education commends the consideration of quality circles as an intervention strategy. Strategic planning is another intervention strategy currently in vogue in higher education. What in the environment suggests intervention strategies? The array of challenges facing higher education are all-too-familiar: declining enrollments, increased competition for nontraditional students, greater demands accountability, increased costs, scarcer resources, and an aging faculty and staff with fewer promotion opportunities. For some higher education institutions, the intervention response will mean survival.

With obstruse outputs of higher education, quality circles have the potential for streamlining systems and improving effectiveness. Cost savings, while not as prominent a measure as for industry, are more

indirect. Productivity improves. Perhaps more importantly, changes in circle member attitudes - increased morale, sense of importance, and feeling of ownership may be the more important benefit accruing to education. Some question which is the real purpose of quality circles, to improve effectiveness or to improve employee attitudes. Chase warned:

> Many have implemented pseudo-participation programs in which the hidden agenda was to manipulate staff into feeling involved in the decision making/problem solving processes of the organization when, in fact, the leader who was not sincere. The sincere commitment of the top administrator will be tested early in the quality circle program[23] (p. 25).

As a strategy of cooptation, quality circles especially need the sincere commitment of higher education leadership. Faculty and staff are much better educated than the typical industrial employee. The "organization man" mentality is less pervasive in an environment of academic freedom.

O'Hanlon (1983) considered the application of Theory Z to education and contrasted American school staffs to that of Ouchi's Japanese model:

Characteristics of Staff Organization

Japanese Organizations[24] (p. 58)	American Schools[25] (p. 16)
1. Lifetime Employment	1. Short-term employment that may become lifetime employment
2. Slow evaluation and promotion	2. Slow evaluation and slow, or more likely no promotion
3. Nonspecialized career paths	3. Semi-specialized career paths
4. Implicit control mechanisms	4. Explicit control mechanisms
5. Collective decision making	5. Individual decision making
6. Collective responsibility	6. Individual responsibility
7. Holistic concern	7. Segmented concern

Despite the disparity in organizational staff characteristics, O'Hanlon (1983) suggested analysis of each in each individual school situation to determine the relevance of the concepts to education management[26] (p. 18).

Examples of Quality Circles in Higher Education

Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon was the first community college in the nation to organize a productivity center. It began quality circle operations in 1981 with six initial circles. Circle success has been impressive with sixteen in operation. Only one circle has folded. Over 300 employees have been involved. (Contact: Julie Aspinwall-Lamberts, Lane Community College, Eugene, Oregon).

Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, North Carolina also implemented quality circles in 1981. There have been sixteen circles, all but two of which have been successful. The College has taken a role

of training local businesses and industries in the mechanics of quality circles. (Contact: Doris McIlwain, Central Piedmont Community College, P.O. Box 35009, Charlotte, North Carolina 35009).

Middlesex County College in Edison, New Jersey has adapted the quality circle concept, applying it to peer tutoring[27] (pp. 34-35).

At the University of Cincinnati, there are now eight circles operating after two years. Officials there believe their institution to be one of the earliest and few institutions operating a system of quality circles at the university level. (Contact: Jill Parriff, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio).

IV. CASE STUDY: MIDLANDS TECHNICAL COLLEGE

Midlands Technical College has begun implementing a system of quality circles.

Midlands Technical College is a public two-year, state supported, three-campus college in Columbia, South Carolina.

A. The Need for Participatory Management

There were three factors spurring the College's consideration of a shift to a participative management system. First, there was an award of a Title III grant to the College. The "Improving Institutional Management Capability" project calls for the College "to define the management style to be used in operating the institution that will establish the parameters for selecting a formal management system to implement."

Second, the environment in which the College operates evolved considerably over the past ten years. In less than ten years, the

College doubled its enrollment, expanded its course offerings to 57 programs, and changed its clientele from traditional to non-traditional students. Yet, enrollment has peaked, showing a decline in recent years. The retention rate is a less-than-desirable 55 percent. Resources remain scarce with costs rising. These factors commend an intervention strategy for organizational renewal. The College responded not only with a quality circle system but also a strategic planning process. This ad hoc process, participatory itself, would result in revised mission and philosophy statements and long-range goals and institutional objectives. The entire planning process itself was being revamped. The new planning process would be more resource-allocative and closer linked with the budget process.

Third, there was a change in leadership of the College. The College's President of twenty years resigned amidst financial questions in 1981. He had been the only president in the College's history. If not the most senior community college president nationally, he was close. His one attempt to institute a specific management system had been through Management-By-Objectives (MBO) in 1974. The paperwork requirements became so burdensome that enthusiasm vanished, follow-up faltered, and the system became defunct. The utilization of MBO nationwide has declined. The previous president was an autocratic manager. The MBO system was not compatible with his authoritarian style. Its demise further underscored his own management style. The chairman of the College's governing board, in announcing the new President, Dr. James R.

Morris, Jr., stated: "We wanted someone who was well-versed in management theory and also understood the mission and goals of technical education." The College's twenty year anniversary publication A Story of Progess 1963-1983 referred to the new president as having "an approach to education which is progressive and a commitment to excellence which is legendary." Under Morris' proactive leadership, use of more traditional forms of participatory management such as committees and task forces were expanded.

The Title III grant specified that many management styles would be considered. However, it gave explicit focus to the then-recently emerged and highly-publicized Theory Z. Management systems specified for consideration were management by exception, objective-oriented management, and quality circles.

The Director of Planning and Research, program coordinator for the Improving Institutional Management Capability project, provided research on participative alternatives to the President.

The grant called for a promulgation of management style to define the parameters of the system. The literature suggests this as being a first step in establishing a participatory management system. Accordingly, a management philosophy statement was issued and disseminated College-wide in August, 1983 (see Appendix A).

B. Organizational Climate

As an earlier part of the Title III Management project, an organizational development study of the College was conducted by Ladd and Associates of Raleigh, North Carolina. The consultant developed

a survey which was administered to all faculty and staff. Perceptions on the organization and its management team were determined. The study was confidentially reported to the President. Its major public finding was that there existed a widespead persistence of "latent loyalty" throughout the College. That loyalty needed to be activated. Other findings on perceptions on individual managers were to be used in staff changes for an impending reorganization. Ultimately, the finding of "latent loyalty" was a virtual prerequisite for the establishment of quality circles. The organizational development nature of quality circles was underscored.

C. Steering Committee

Midlands Technical College did not establish a Quality Circle Steering Committee, per se. President Morris established an ad hoc Organizational Renewal Committee. The group would consider a wide range of organizational development issues, including management philosophy. The President outlined his ideas for participatory management and the group was amenable to quality circles. The committee's agenda and the ultimate implementation of quality circles was logjammed by two factors. One, some felt the committee did not have broad enough representation. This perception was held despite the President's selecting the group mostly from faculty and staff nominees. Accordingly, additional representation was added to the committee. This caused a delay of several months in the group's agenda. Second, some feared the committee would be given the responsibility for personnel changes in an impending reorganization.

The President thus felt the need to accelerate the regorganization timetable several months. The chief academic officer was removed. In the ensuing transitional climate, the committee's agenda was essentially dormant.

The steering committee's next major action was to review the four proposals informally solicited from potential quality circle consultants. At the next meeting in December, 1983, the coordinator provided a training overview of quality circles.

The Organizational Renewal Committee has since been involved in reviewing the College's strategic planning statements. The group will review and approve the guidelines for quality circles, monitor the progress of the circles, and most importantly, make the determination after the pilot effort expires in December, 1984 whether to implement quality circles on a permanent basis. The consultant selected considered the evaluative function to be the ultimate and conclusive role of quality circle steering committees. He deemphasized the prominent role the literature assigns to the steering committees.

D. Consultant Selection

The selection of a training consultant to help install quality circles is a critical choice in the success of quality circle implementation. It is an option which an organization could forego if cost were a factor. As an alternative, extensive review of the literature by a prospective coordinator could cut costs. Another option would be to send circle facilitators and leaders to training

workshops conducted nationwide by the International Association of Quality Circles (IAQC). Neither are recommended as a substitute for an experienced qualified quality circle consultant. Thompson emphasized that even with a consultant, the organization would have to eventually assume a "do it yourself" attitude if quality circles were to become a permanent and self-sustaining process[28] (p. 46). Involvement with local chapters of IAQC would provide good contacts for a self-starting effort. Midlands Technical College was fortunate to have a local chapter just installed. Visits to similar institutions are another option. The increase in membership in the IAQC has created a large pool of potential consultants without consistent qualifications. Thompson cautioned:

> "The recent explosion of interest in quality circles has hatched a new breed of instant experts. Very few have the actual experience with quality circles. After hearing a lecture, attending a seminar or reading an article, they feel qualified to pose as experts[29] (p. 46).

He adduced a consultant checklist as a method for organizations to establish standards. Under Thompson's guidelines, the consultant should:

1. Have worked directly in the promotion, training, and advising of 20 or more quality circles (beyond the pilot stage).
2. Have been involved with quality circles over two years.
3. Can provide you with training materials (manuals, workbooks, slides, etc.).

4. Be willing to spend at least a week at your organization training the circle leaders and the first circles, as well as advisors and trainers, if necessary.
5. Be willing to remain available indefinitely to answer questions and help solve problems that arise[30] (p. 46).

Thompson's criteria are too ambitious and unrealistic. However, they do provide a standard by which to judge potential consultants.

The College solicited potential consultants informally. Four were requested to send proposals. Later, as a result of the steering committee's tentative recommendation of the criteria for selection, the criteria was incorporated into a formal solicitation. This was through the state government bidding process. Community colleges interested in consultant procurement should consider in advance cumbersome public procurement processes.

The criteria established by the steering committee was 1 - cost, 2 - knowledge of group processes and quality circles, and 3 - experience at implementing a quality circle program in higher education, especially at the community college level. The last factor was considered pivotal. Casey Fast, Productivity Center Director, at Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon was chosen as consultant.

E. Training

The consultant establishes the training agenda. It was considered necessary to provide uniform information to the entire College faculty and staff. Publicity on the basics of quality

circles was provided institution-wide through the College newspaper. Initial overview training orientation sessions were provided for all faculty and staff. All were urged to attend. Given the voluntary nature of participative management, mandatory attendance was not required. Small group meetings were held for facilitator, coordinator, and leader training. Due to out-of-state commitments, the President and exective staff were unable to receive training as a group. Member training was to be a function assumed by facilitators and leaders. Of those attending the facilitator leader training, the consultant was given an evaluative average rating of 8.4 out of a possible 10. Training for leaders and facilitators was provided in problem identification and selection, cause and effect analysis, solution determination, and management presentation. Problems associated with the training included logistical problems of coordinating acceptable meeting times and locations for a three campus college. Inevitably, there was scattered disgruntlement at not being able to be involved as a model circle. Overall the response and interest expressed was most encouraging.

F. Implementation

The Director of Planning and Research, the program's coordinator, was initially named as the interim facilitator for the pilot period by the President. It was decided that the pilot period would extend from April through December, 1984. After which, the effort would be evaluated for possible permanent implementation. In the future, as the pilot effort is expanded, Midlands Technical

College will request applications from interested units. Implementation will be scheduled at a time feasible for facilitation.

It was initially determined that there should be three to five model circles for the pilot phase. A pilot effort was necessary due to the patience required to reach problem solutions for initial circles. Slow decision making is a tenet of Theory Z. Also, with facilitators required to spend initially two to six hours weekly for pilot circles and an hour per week for mature circles, times constraints dictate gradual implementation. Efforts to determine which departments were "typical" were inconclusive. Thompson (1982) suggested targeting groups with the highest probability of success[31] (p. 132). Departments composed of proactive managers, enthusiastic people, those with a strong team identity, and those versed in group processes were prominent considerations for selection. Such decisions are highly subjective.

The pilot emphasis was to be on academic departments. Yet the Vice Presidents for Management and Student Affairs sought involvement for their departments in the pilot effort. Some academic deans wanted to take a wait-and-see attitude. Other deans considered their areas to already have participative processes. Long-range solicitation of interest would be needed at a more decentralized (departmental) level.

Interest and willingness to implement grew among departments during the initial training. This also presented problems. Some non-academic departments initially committed for the pilot effort

were necessarily relegated to Phase II to begin mid-Summer 1984. Some academic departments with fewer than four employees wanted to pilot circles. This issue will be considered further after the pilot effort when all units will be invited to implement quality circles. The solution may be to link several departments which are small but with similar functions in order to get the requisite number required for a circle. All units willing to pilot quality circles cannot logistically be accomodated during a pilot phase. This upset some. Thus, it is important to keep an institution-wide flow of information and publicity. Successes of the initial circles if publicized adequately, will be the best selling point. Otherwise, interest can wane in the lag between initial orientation and post-pilot implementation.

Selection of a facilitator is an important choice. Most of the literature ascribes to this position as significant to the ultimate success. Thompson (1982) suggested that the facilitator should be a full-time job unless the organization is small (under 200)[32] (p. 136). He cited the experience of using many part-time facilitators in large organizations who did full-time facilitating despite other duties. The consultant training made it apparent that in light of the other duties administered by the Director of Planning and Research, facilitation of even the five model circles would consume an inordinate amount of his time.

The expectation of an expanding system of quality circles is that as circles become operative and proficient, leaders can assume

facilitation functions for new circles. In recognition of time demands on the interim facilitator, the division of labor was shared for facilitating the initial five circles. Several of the leaders were to assume another model circle for initial facilitation. The initial operation of circles was expected to develop additional members who would be effective co-facilitators.

Dewar (1980) suggested that one facilitator should be able to handle 20 mature circles[33] (p. 159). At a community college in an era of scarce resources such as Midlands Technical College, part-time and co-facilitators are the only economically feasible means of facilitation. The only foreseeable way facilitation could become full-time for a large number of circles is for the system to be extraordinarily successful. To have a large system in which only a few individuals facilitated nearly full-time, many circles would require faculty release time. The College is currently considering this as a future option.

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Even though all faculty and staff attended a quality circle orientation session, the information dissemination continued. The interim facilitator provided further information College-wide. Follow-up questions were answered. Trouble-shooting was undertaken as he answered follow-up questions and corrected misconceptions arising from the initial training. A memorandum was sent to all department heads stating the facilitator's availability for a 15 minute follow-up session upon request. Information packets were

disseminated College-wide. Periodic reports in the newsletter and faculty-staff newsletter will be provided. Crucial to a broader institution-wide receptivity will be the publication of any successes derived from quality circle problem solving.

At this point, five model circles have begun operation for the pilot phase.

The consultant made several recommendations to the President. First, that all managers of the College receive quality circle training. Second, that the interim facilitator and leaders be given increased support and authority. Third, that the option to receive participative management training be given to all departments in setting up their annual departmental objectives. Fourth, that the President "drop in" on initial circle meetings to provide encouragement. Fifth, that all management presentations be open to all College faculty and staff. Lastly, if the circles are successful, the College can introduce quality circles into committees through Verteam Circles (verticle teams). Metz (1981) described this adaptation of the quality circle model spanning participants from several departments[34] (pp. 78-85).

H. Evaluation

The Midlands Technical College pilot quality circle effort will expire in December, 1984. Evaluation of the pilot effort will then be undertaken. The formal evaluation will not be methodologically rigid. To a certain extent, it will be impressionistic. Dewar (1980) provided a process questionnaire for the evaluation of

steering committees, facilitators, leaders, and training[35] (pp. 292-304). He suggested quality improvement, cost reduction, and attitude improvement as output measures. Evaluation can also be done in terms of the number of pilot circles continuing to operate and number of management presentations. The dual objectives of quality circles are improved productivity and improved employee attitudes. Thus, if the positive outcome of increased productivity is not attained, there may be value in the process itself.

V. CONCLUSION

Quality circles are a participatory management method of demonstrated success. The recent popularity and the tendency of management fads to come and go give quality circles a faddish image. Not laying the necessary groundwork and a misunderstanding of the conceptual foundations of the model are causes for failure.

The Theory Z model is too inherent to Japanese culture. Yet it provides a good progression of steps for an organization to improve its interpersonal relationships and alter interorganizational power relationships. Disparate organizational characteristics of industry and higher education can converge in the establishment of a similar participatory management model if there is commitment to an overall philosophy, with a long-range vision, and a culture of trust and people-regarding.

Quality circles are expanding in higher education. The oldest higher education quality circles have but a short history. Thus, little in the literature goes beyond considering problems in quality circle

implementation for academia, and suggesting that it can be done. The circles which failed will never be documented. Cross-organization evaluation will be difficult. No organization with a failed system of quality circles will want to be studied. Case studies of quality circle systems provide a good overview. However, they are too institution-specific. They can also be too department-specific. The paucity of apparent implementation in higher education suggests that either this participative management technique is a sleeper or else that the diffusion of this innovation has not reached the tradition-bound realm of academia. Also differences in Ouchi's Theory Z environment and the typical school environment could account for limited application.

Midlands Technical College has tailored the quality circle process to its own organizational context. Most factors were put in place which would be considered important to success. Support occurred at the top. The management philosophy was clearly articulated. The institutional mission and philosophy were clarified. There was a cultivation of trust. Staff development and people-building were emphasized. A steering committee representative of College-wide constituents helped oversee the process. Communications were maintained institution-wide. Implementation was gradual.

Whether the institution will succeed in implementing this system is problematic. Even a suspension of circles after a single round of successful problem solution may be more valuable than an ongoing system with mixed results.

Whether the College's system of circles succeeds or not, it has undertaken the pre-implementation activities necessary for successful implementation. If the institution learned a lesson from the pre-implementation phase, it is that there can never be too much planning for the establishment of quality circles.

Results will be determined after a reasonable trial period. Should Midlands Technical College be successful with quality circles, it can maximize existing scarce resources for more efficient and effective administration.

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